

Rep. Mary Bono Mack, R-Calif., held court Friday at her subcommittee, hearing from lawmakers who disagree on whether Congress should lift a 2006 federal ban on Internet gambling.

Bono Mack's Energy and Commerce Trade subcommittee could play a crucial role in determining whether online gambling legislation moves ahead, but she gave few hints on where she stands during her second hearing on this topic.

"This is an important issue which I have been following very closely in hopes of making certain that everyone is dealt a fair hand," she said in her opening statement before ticking off the pros and cons on each side.

Her subcommittee became a promising path for a gambling bill on a detour after another route--through Financial Services--closed off.

Financial Service Ranking Member Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., and **Rep. John Campbell**, R-Calif., visited Bono Mack's subcommittee to pitch their bill as a small government policy that makes good economic sense.

"Passing legislation like ours would foster the development and growth of a new American industry, which would bring along with it thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity, the revenues of which could be taxed to assist our ailing federal budget," Campbell said.

Frank, ranking member of the Financial Services Committee, said the effort had stalled in his own committee because Chairman Spencer Bachus, R-Ala., isn't convinced the ban should go.

But a bill introduced by Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, lifting the ban on online poker—but not all gambling—could give Frank and Campbell a foothold to move some of their goals through Bono Mack's subcommittee instead.

“If all we could get would be poker, I’d be for it,” Frank said.

Campbell also supports rerouting through Energy and Commerce.

“There’s a clear path in the Energy and Commerce Committee, so we’re supporting the [Barton] bill and hope it passes,” said Christopher Bognanno, communications director for **Campbell**.

How the House will approach online gambling isn’t perfectly clear because GOP members are split. Some oppose legalization as hurting traditional values; others support it in a libertarian argument against government excess.

But the outcome rests on Bono Mack, who can schedule a markup for Barton’s bill if she’s won over. Barton is hoping for a markup this year, his spokesman said.

But Bono Mack isn’t convinced just yet one way or the other.

“No markup is imminent,” said Ken Johnson, an aide to Bono Mack.

The next step is a hearing with federal law enforcement officials sometime next year, he said.